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ABSTRACT

This study was conducted at the California State University to determine if the utilization of a carefully planned and systematically applied course of instruction could change the attitudes of graduate special education students toward handicapped persons. The focus of the 16-session course was on the handicapped individual as a person and on the manifestations of disability which could impede learning and social disability. Special education was treated as a science rather than an art. The 3-hour instruction period was divided into a) a one-hour lecture presentation; b) a 30-minute group discussion; and c) a 90-minute small (4 member) group discussion. The attitude measurement instruments used in the study were the Attitude Toward Disabled Persons Scale (ATDP) and the Preferred Student Characteristic Scale (PSCS), both of which were taken by the students before and after the course. Both male and female students showed improvement on the ATDP scale, but only males showed improvement on PSCS. The findings of this study support the hypothesis that an instructor can effect a positive change in the attitude of his students toward disabled persons through the use of a well-planned, consistently applied program. (HMD)

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THE IMPACT OF CLASS INSTRUCTION IN CHANGING STUDENT ATTITUDES

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The study of attitudes toward disability and handicapped individuals has received increasing attention and focus from social psychologists, rehabilitation workers, and special educators over the past several decades. Gellman (1929) stated that prejudice toward disabled individuals exists at all socioeconomic levels and in all geographic regions of the United States. While another special educator has asserted that the American cultural dedication to success coupled with the opening of relatively few channels for the disabled to achieve that success, creates anxiety and insecurity with potential personality disorganization (Trippe, 1959).

Yuker (1965) noted that nondisabled individuals with negative attitudes toward disability tended to avoid interactions with members of this group, and that even such nondisabled individuals helped to accept disabled peers, the quality of the acceptance being only superficial. He further observed a tendency for such persons to assign to the disabled a class status and to attribute to them presumed class characteristics. In contrast, Mader (1967) found that teachers of different disability groups had comparable attitudes toward physically handicapped persons.

Goffman (1963) cautions that stigma involves not so much a set of concrete individuals who can be sorted into neat piles, the normal

and the stigmatized, as a pervasive two-role social process in which every individual participates in both roles at least in some connections and in some phases of life. He also makes the critical point that normal and the stigmatized are not persons but rather perspectives.

The above generalizations offer some rather provocative ideas for those involved in training special education teachers to work with the handicapped. It has been generally assumed that inherent in teacher training programs is the goal for cultivating and developing more postive and accepting attitudes to handicapped persons. Among the interacting variables that would probably relate to the above goal are the personality of the instructor, course objectives, nature and focus of instructional content, instructional methodology, delivery systems used, and reinforcement contingencies. These are all probably critical variables for consideration in attempting to induce attitude change upon the part of a group of students, especially a university class focusing on the exceptional individual and society.

Wilson and Alcorn (1969) studied the relationship between simulated disability for an eight-hour period and change in attitude toward disability. They utilized 80 S's in two classes in the "Psychology of Exceptional Children." Their subjects were randomly assigned to control and experimental groups. No statistically significant difference was reported for scores obtained on the Attitude Toward Disabled Persons Scale (ATDP). Thus, their instructional intervention technique had no significant impact in changing attitudes.

In contrast to the above study, Lazar, Gensley, and Orpet (1971) found that the attitudes of young gifted children as assessed by the

the ATDP, could be changed through the utilization of a carefully planned and systematically applied instructional program. They found a significant difference ($p<.05$) between the means in favor of the experimental group versus a comparison group. In addition, Lazar, Orpet, and Revie (1972) found a significant difference ($p<.05$) between male and female gifted youngsters, with the difference favoring the females as being more accepting and understanding as measured by the ATDP. More specific information concerning the instructional program used has been reported elsewhere (Lazar, Gensley, and Gowan, 1972).

PURPOSE OF THIS STUDY

The purpose of this study was to ascertain if the attitudes of university students in a special education course could be changed in specific directions as the result of a carefully planned and sequenced instructional program. Enhancement of attitude change as a major instructional goal was determined. The two directions were to be in greater acceptance and understanding as measured by the ATDP, and in the affective dimension versus the cognitive dimension as measured the the Preferred Student Characteristic Scale (PSCS). The following two directional null hypotheses were tested:

1. The post ATDP score would not be significantly ($p \leq .05$) higher then the pre-test ATDP score. In other words, students would not demonstrate greater acceptance and understanding of handicapped persons following the experimental instructional program.

2. The post PSCS score would not be significantly ($p \leq .05$) higher than the pre-test PSCS score. That is to say that the students would not reflect any change in the affective/cognitive dimension as measured by the PSCS following the experimental instructional program.

METHOD AND PROCEDURE

SUBJECTS: The S's were 7 males and 13 females in a graduate course required for the Master's Degree in Special Education at a large Southern California State university. The only required course prior to this was an introductory survey course on exceptional children. Several members of the group were already teaching either mentally retarded or educationally handicapped children.

COURSE INSTRUCTIONAL PROGRAM: The course met one evening a week for three hours over a sixteen week semester. Required reading and independent study focused on Goffman's (1963) Stigma: Notes on the Management of Spoiled Identity; Farber's (1968) Mental Retardation: It's Social Context and Social Consequences; and Jone's (1970) New Directions in Special Education. Other required tasks included abstracting relevant journal articles from different journals and review of selected research relating to social and historical foundations and issues relating to special education. Two examinations were required, a take home essay examination consisting of five questions, and a final examination comprised of objective items.

Finally, six position papers on issues were required, being three to six pages in length, with four themes decided upon by the instructor while student selection was possible for two themes of interest. These were used as the basis for small group discussions.

INSTRUCTIONAL PROCESS: The three hour period of instruction was usually organized into three developmental sequences and modes of presentation. The first hour being devoted to a lecture-conference type presentation by the instructor. This was followed by a thirty minute period of discussion and reports on assigned readings. After a fifteen minute class break, the class resumed as five buzz groups to discuss and react to position papers, practical problem solving situations that were presented by the instructor, and student identified problems from their own teaching experiences. There were no right answers per se for solutions to the problems; stress was placed on logical and cognitive development of arguements and supporting rationales. The instructor attempted to provide verbal reinforcement when the group used a strong cognitive approach, and withheld any verbal reinforcement when an affective approach was used by the buzz group. Post-course student evaluation and critique of the class indicated that this instructional procedure was deemed by most students to be useful in facilitating their ideas and making application of information that was presented in lecture-conference, buzz groups, and through independent study.

ROLE OF INSTRUCTOR: The instructor served three functions in his role as a manager of learning. First, he initiated the period with lectures and discussion on announced themes that would question the previous knowledge and experiences that the students might have had about handicapped persons and special education. A historical time line was used to guide and develop discussion from Ancient times to present day means of caring for and educating the handicapped. Focus was generally on the individual and unique manifestations that might imped learning and social adaptability, and against the use of labels. Stress was also put on the assumption that special education required that teaching be viewed primarily as a science rather then an art. The second function of the instructor was to rotate between the five buzz groups and serve as a facilitator and provide reinforcement for appropriate perspectives as indicated previously. The final role was to serve as an advisor in planning and developing position papers for independent study. In this latter role the instructor used the Socratic method of ins[illegible]ion.

DEPENDENT VARIABLES: Two dependent variables were used. The ATDP Form O as modified by Lazar, Gensley, and Orpet (1971). This instrument was used to measure attitudes toward disability and the handicapped per se, while the PSCS was used to measure perspectives toward the affective/cognitive dimension. Both instruments were group administered during the first (pre-test) and last (posttest) meetings of the course. Detailed information about the ATDP can be found in the works of Shaw and Wright (1967) and the authors of the ATDP, Yuker, Block, and Younng (1966).

The PSCS was developed by Nelson (1964) to access affective and cognitive attitudes toward instructional goals. The assumption being that a cognitive teacher would be primarily concerned with the intellectual, abstract, and subject-matter objectives and learning. Whereas, the affective teacher would be more concerned with the emotional aspects of the student and classroom climate including inter-relationships.

Schmidt and Nelson (1969) reported use of the PSCS in a study of teachers of the EMR in grades seven through twelve. They reported finding a significant relationship between sex of the teacher and the grade level at the junior high level, but that this finding did not extend to the high school level.

RESULTS OF STUDY

The results of this study are summarized in Table 1. As indicated in the table, the posttest ATDP scores were significantly higher for both males and females. Thus, the first null hypothesis is rejected at the .05 level of probability, and the research hypothesis is supported that the students attitudes toward the handicapped as measured by the ATDP were enhanced.

In contrast, the second null hypothesis was rejected ($p < .05$) for the male students but accepted for the female students. In other words, the males evidenced a significant shift in greater cognitive perspective as assessed by the PSCS; however, the difference between the pre and post PSCS scores for the females was not significant.

DISCUSSION

As indicated in Table 1 both males and females made significant gains on their ATDP scores. It appears that the instructional program for this course did help facilitate a shift in attitude change toward greater understanding and acceptance. While it is assumed that the course did have some impact, it must be realized that there might have been other contributing influences such as other special education courses being taken concurrently, and other incidental type learnings and interacting forces that could assist in attitude shift. The important thing is that a positive attitude shift did result, and it is assumed that a great extent of this shift might be attributed to the instructor and the instructional program. To what degree or extent, must remain an unknown.

In terms of the second null hypothesis, the males did make a significant shift in the direction of greater cognitive perspective as evidence by the results of the PSCS score. In contrast, the females made a slight reverse shift toward being less cognitive, but not significantly so. No logical explanation can be rendered to explain this result. Cohen (1964) states that who says something is as important as what is said in understanding the effect of a communication on an attitude. How the listener perceives the communicator can effect attitude change in numerous ways: the vividness of personality, status, expertise attributed, and stakes in issue. All of these can make a difference. Maybe, according to

what has been postulated by Cohen, one or more of these factors might explain the differences on the PSCS scores between the males and females. Thus, one might ask, how much did the instructor as a variable influence the change as well as the special instructional program. It was observed by the instructor that the males in the class tended to identify more closely with his views in discussion than the females. This might be a clue which indicated this variable bias that assisted in changing the male perspective on the two criterion measures.

Rokeach (1971) points out how attitudes and values can be changed through information control, but raises the haunting question as to who shall decide which values and attitudes are to be changed. Even more so, in what direction of change offers some serious ethical considerations that educators and those involved in experimental research must give serious consideration. To what extend should our educators and institutions shape attitudes and values remains a serious axiological question to be resolved. Yet, if we are to attack racial, ethinic, religious, and other forms of human prejudice, we cannot shun away from attitude research and change.

SUMMARY

The findings of this study support the notion that an instructor can change the attitudes of his students with a carefully planned and sequenced instructional program using structured themes and

positive reinforcement. In a period of growing concern for instructional accountability for learning, this study indicates how an instructor might demonstrate pupil growth and attitudinal change as part of his instructional effort and instructional goal. Finally, it was indicated that research in attitude change involves some axiological issues that need to be resolved by educators and researchers in conducting attitude research.

More attention and experimentation needs to be conducted, but under carefully controlled conditions based upon the highest consideration for the students involved. Yet, if we are to train and educate effective teachers in special education for future work with the handicapped, it will be necessary to enhence accepting and understanding attitudes of the handicapped.

TABLE 1

MEANS AND t VALUES FOR SCORES ON THE ATDP AND PSCS SCALES

TEST	SEX & N	PRETEST MEAN	POSTTEST MEAN	t	p
ATDP	Male = 7	77.60	85.71	2.37	.05
	Female = 13	74.22	81.53	2.87	.05
PSCS	Male = 7	17.43	20.85	2.32	.05
	Female = 13	16.61	15.38	.93	ns

$p < .05$ (one tail test)

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